

Autonomic Dysreflexia (A.D.)

VA



U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs
DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH & HUMAN SERVICES

A.D. is possible with a spinal cord injury (SCI) at or above T-6. It is an **acute medical emergency** which could result in a seizure or stroke as a result of high blood pressure.

THIS IS LIFE-THREATENING & MUST BE TREATED IMMEDIATELY.

- Sit up and raise level of head
- Loosen tight clothing or shoes
- Check bladder drainage
- If A.D. occurs during bowel program, stop bowel program
- Check skin

Seek emergency medical treatment if signs continue. Report A.D. to your health care provider.

Notes to Health Care Provider: Temporary treatment (vasodilators):

- 2% Nitroglycerin (Nitro-Bid ointment or Nitroglycerin sublingual tab)
- Nifedipine Procardia (bitten or chewed)
- Atropine (only for significant bradycardia)

Common Warning Signs & Causes of A.D

Warning Signs

- Sudden rise in blood pressure (20-40 mmHg systolic > normal)
- Pounding headache
- Sweating above level of SCI
- Blotchy or flushed skin
- Goose bumps
- Blurry vision, stuffy nose
- Anxiety, feeling something is not right
- Chest tightness, heart flutters, difficulty breathing

Causes

- **Bladder:** overfull, blocked catheter, stones or infection
- **Bowel:** irritation, digital stimulation, constipation, impaction, hemorrhoids
- **Skin:** injury, sores, ingrown toenail, tight belts/clothing
- Menstrual cramps
- Genital stimulation during sexual activity